

Does Halal Product Availability and Accessibility Enhanced Halal Awareness and Intention to Purchase Halal Packaged Food Products: Malaysia and Thailand's Halal Industry Perspective

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Abstract— Halal industry is a huge business. The business is not Muslim-specific yet some of the non-Muslim consumers become a regular user of halal products due to holistic conception of halal itself-cleanliness and wholesomeness. Such development shows that halal awareness is evident among Muslim and non-Muslim consumers. Halal awareness has been cited as the major determinant for intention to purchase halal products but lack of understanding that made up halal awareness that lead to halal consumption. Rooted from ATAR model, this study aims to examine the effect of halal product accessibility and availability on halal awareness of packaged food products in Malaysia and Thailand consumers. In addition, halal awareness also proposed to influence intention to purchase halal packaged food products. The study among 760 consumers in Malaysia and Thailand revealed that accessibility enhanced halal awareness for Muslim-dominant country whereby availability plays a crucial role in explaining halal awareness for non-Muslim-dominant country. Theoretical and managerial implication as well as future direction of the study is discussed at the end of the article.

Keywords: *Halal purchase intention, halal awareness, halal supply chain, halal accessibility, halal availability.*

1. Introduction

Halal marketing practices is rapidly growing and gaining worldwide acceptance. It is a huge business that changed overall business landscape in many countries. Halal marketing of products and services may include the totality of supply chain management thus tremendously affected

various stakeholders start from the 'point of origin' until the 'point of consumption'. Halal marketing practices is well accepted because it is now goes beyond the religious concerns due to favorable perception of non-Muslim consumers towards healthier and cleanliness goods [1] [2]. The term 'halal' is an Arabic word which refers to what is permitted or lawful in Islam. The conception of halal is applicable widely in our daily life, not only limited to foods and drinks but cover all aspects of Muslim life such as safety, cleanliness, animal welfare, social justice as well as sustainable environment [3]. Halal conception also closely related to 'Toyyiban' which is refer to 'clean and wholesome'. Hence, halal products are significant and suitable for consumption among consumers of all religions.

Multinationals had acknowledged the halal industry opportunity. It is forecasted that global halal market size is set to be around USD 9.17 trillion by 2025. Such development is contributed from economic development of major Muslim countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, India and Iran. Besides, Thailand, Philippines and China also had heavily invested in halal related operation, research & development, and technology to fulfil the halal demand [4]. The report by The Borneo Post also indicated that among the major contributor for halal market is based on food and beverage spending (USD1.3 trillion) followed by clothing and apparel at USD270 billion, media and entertainment at USD209 billion, travel & leisure at USD177 billion, and spending on pharmaceuticals and cosmetics at USD148 billion. Malaysia with the advantage of global reputable halal certification and logo, is aims to continue to lead the halal industry [5]. In Thailand, halal food market alone worth USD6 billion in 2015, whereby export was estimated to account at least half of the total value. Reference [6]

reported that Thailand aims to be the fifth largest halal food exporter in 2020. Besides, around 4 million Muslim consumers recorded in Thailand in 2015. In addition, numerous strategic actions were taken by local authority to boost halal demand in Thailand.

Despite the interesting facts and figures on halal industry, little is known on what the influential factors that lead consumer decision to purchase halal products especially for non-Muslim consumers [7], [8]. Besides, Muslim consumers and manufacturers also may not have adequate knowledge, awareness and understanding of halal conception [9] [10]. For instance, foods and beverages produced by Muslim, not necessarily halal if the ingredients is based on non-halal sources or tools. Hence, understanding consumer's awareness towards halal product is apparently crucial. Halal awareness received a considerable attention among scholars in understanding intention to purchase and purchase behavior of halal products (such as reference [10], [11] and [12]). Researchers [13] claimed that many factors could lead halal awareness but most of the past literatures focused on halal logo and certification.

Hence, this study attempts to understand purchase intention of halal packaged food products rooted from ATAR model perspective (Awareness, Trial, Availability, Repeat Purchase). ATAR model commonly employed to forecast new product adoption [14] in the supply chain. Halal product could be new to certain target group of people [15]. The main assumption of the ATAR model is people would try the new product if they are 'aware' of the new product. For awareness to adequately induced trial, marketers need to make the product 'available' and 'accessible' throughout supply chain context. In halal marketing context and supply chain management, both elements (availability and accessibility) are crucial in Malaysia and Thailand market. Hence, this study attempts to examine the relationship between 1) halal merchandise availability and accessibility on halal awareness and 2) halal awareness and intention to purchase halal packaged food products. This study attempts the compare the proposed relationship between Malaysia and Thailand consumers.

2. Literature review

2.1 Halal Industry in Malaysia and Thailand

Halal is an Arabic word which refers to 'lawful' or 'permitted' among Muslim consumers. Halal universally applicable in every aspect of life and not limited to foods and drinks. However, halal conception in this study refers to food products. In food industry, halal conception also may cover the conception of 'toyyiban' which is not only permissible but also deemed 'good, pure or wholesome' [16]. This is inline as highlighted in the Quran: "Eat of what is on earth, lawful and good" (2:168). In short, halal

is synonymous with Muslim but nowadays well accepted among non-Muslim consumers [2].

Malaysia is Muslim dominance country as compared to Thailand which is dominated by Buddhist. Thus, demand for halal product for both countries slightly differ. However, with recent development of halal acceptance worldwide, halal practices in non-Muslim country such as Thailand also steadily grown and gained attention from consumers, government and manufacturers [17]. Muslim population in Malaysia is about 16,318,355 (61.3% of overall population) whereby in Thailand is about 3,000,000 (4.3%) [18]. According to Malaysian International Food & Beverages Trade Fair (MIFB), the global halal industry is expected to grow between USD3 trillion (RM12.21 trillion) and USD4 trillion (RM16.28 trillion) within the next five years, from the current US\$2 trillion (RM8.14 trillion) in 2019 [19]. Malaysia not only produced to cater a local demand but exported halal products to major countries such as Singapore, China, Japan and Indonesia with the amount of RM43.3 billion [20]. Thailand, besides fulfilling the need of their local Muslim minority, the halal products demand also recorded from tourist in Thailand. Surprisingly, Thailand also exported USD35.7 billion in 2018 mostly to member countries of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) [21].

Packaged food market is expected to growth at a CAGR 4.5% in 2015-2020, with value worth USD3.03 trillion by 2020 [22]. Packaged foods become popular among consumers due to several reasons such as convenience of consumption, easy cooking and handling, safety issues, changing lifestyle as well as increased health awareness. Major product categories may include ready meals, baked foods, breakfast cereals, soups, baby foods, potato chips, nuts, instant noodles, pasta, biscuits, chocolate any many more [22]. Among the giant producers of halal packaged food products in Malaysia includes Nestle, Cadbury, Ayamas, Saudi, Dutch Lady, Gardenia, Mamee, Rex and so on while in Thailand, the brand such as Mama, Wel-B Snack, CP, Lays, Koh Kae, Potae and many more dominated the halal market.

2.2 Intention to Purchase

Intention to purchase widely used in understanding consumers' actual behavior. Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) [23], one's behavior and intention could be explained by attitude towards behavior, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control. Previous studies (such as reference [24], [25], [26], [27], [28], [29]) attempted to understand consumer behavior towards halal consumption through application of TPB. This study employed a part of ATAR model to understand consumer intention to purchase halal packaged food products. ATAR model is widely used to estimate consumer acceptance towards new product [14]. In this context, halal product

could be assumed as new product to certain target group especially for non-Muslim. The main assumption in ATAR model is that, consumer will trial a new product if they are aware, and awareness is enhanced through availability and accessibility of the product. In this study, trial which refers to limited usage that permit customer to verify product claim is found to be able to translate into intention to purchase. In short, intention to purchase in this study refers to as a measure of the strength of one's intention to perform a specific behavior or make the decision to buy halal packaged food products [30].

2.3 Predictors of Intention to Purchase Halal Products

Review of literatures indicated that most of the past studies employed Theory of Planned Behavior in understanding halal purchase intention and behavior. As a result, most discussions and predictors identified were floating around attitude towards halal, perceived behavior control and subjective norms. Table 1 summarized selected most recent literatures that employed TPB.

Table 1. Selected researches using TPB in halal literature

No.	Author(s)	Predictors	Context of study	Remarks
1.	Reference [31]	Attitude, subjective norm (SN), perceived behavioral control (PBC), awareness	Non-South African Muslim in Africa Halal food	SN and PBC not significant
2.	Reference [24]	Attitude towards halal food, SN, PBC	Non-Muslim consumers in Malaysia Food product	All significantly influenced repurchase intention
3.	Reference [32]	Attitude, SN, PBC	Gen-Y consumers in Malaysia Halal food product	Attitude insignificant
4.	Reference [33]	Attitude, SN, PBC, Religiosity	Muslim consumers in Malaysia Halal food truck	All significant
5.	Reference [34]	Attitude, SN, PBC	Muslim consumers in United Kingdom Halal-labelled food product	All significant
6.	Reference [8]	Attitude, SN, PBC, religiosity	Muslim consumers in Malaysia Cosmetic product	Subjective norm insignificant
7.	Reference [26]	Attitude, SN, PBC	Muslim consumers in Singapore Food product	All variables significant
8.	Reference [35]	Attitude, SN, PBC	Muslim consumers in Malaysia Halal financing product	All significant
9.	Reference [36]	Attitude, SN, PBC	Muslim travelers in Malaysia Halal destination Revisit	All significant

However, several other scholars focused to understand halal purchase behavior from different perspectives. As cited by reference [37], halal studies appeared in halal literatures under various themes such as halal certification, halal attributes, halal awareness, halal marketing, information technology adoption, halal integrity, halal food supply chain, halal logistics and halal supply chain performance.

2.4 Relationship between Halal Accessibility, Halal Merchandise Availability, Halal Awareness and Intention to Purchase Halal Packaged Food Product

Halal awareness refers to the extents to which consumers having special interest in or experience of something and/or being well informed of what is happening at the present time with regard to halal foods, drinks and products [38]. Reference [39] highlighted that awareness is a result of consumer familiar about the availability and accessibility of the company's product or service. Halal accessibility refers to the extent to which consumer's perception towards product availability and ease of

accessibility of halal product to the potential consumers [40]. Meanwhile, halal merchandise availability refers to the extent to which consumer's perception towards the width and depth of the halal product assortment offered by the resellers (reference [41] and [42]).

Reference [13] indicated that halal awareness is triggered from four major sources namely; religious belief, halal certification, exposure and health reason. The study among 210 Muslims in Shah Alam, Malaysia revealed that all the four proposed sources of awareness statistically significant. Reference [43] study among 234 consumers in Indonesia highlighted religious belief, self-identity and media exposure as determinant for halal awareness. Meanwhile, reference [44] found that easy access and availability of halal food among the key criteria for Muslim tourist preference to choose halal concept hotel in Malaysia. This is crucial for the non-Muslim country such as Thailand. Thailand received considerable number of Muslim tourist every year thus, the halal product accessibility is crucial.

Researchers [45] study among 194 consumers in Iran towards cosmetic halal awareness found that owner of the

brands should strategically made the product accessible to improve consumer's knowledge and awareness. In branding literature, awareness is a fundamental to build strong brand [46]. Scholar [47] on his review on marketing of halal branding stated that advertising exposure, quality, religiosity, mental norm, trust, credibility of halal logo/certification, purity and accessibility of halal are crucial to improve halal branding.

Reference [48] and [49] stressed that product availability among the main reason Muslim consumers are willing to purchase halal cosmetic and personal care. Reference [50] study on Muslim awareness and perception of non-food product among 236 government servant in Malaysia indicate that halal information, halal on media, halal-related program and availability influenced halal awareness. In addition, reference [51] explore halal tourism in Malaysia and Singapore and suggested that action towards promoting the availability of halal product is imperative to strengthen halal tourism in both countries. Similarly, reference [52] proposed that availability and variety of halal merchandise need an adequate attention and action from authority to boost halal food consumption especially among Generation Y in Malaysia. Besides, the authors also suggested to incorporate halal knowledge and awareness syllabus at the school level to promote the right understanding of halal product. Meanwhile, a study by reference [53] among consumers in Pakistan on halal personal care revealed that perceived availability and awareness do not significantly affect consumer's perception and decision towards halal personal care.

Based on the preceding discussion and guided with ATAR model assumption, it is indicate that accessibility

and availability of halal product are crucial is stimulating awareness and consumer preference toward halal product. Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Halal product accessibility have a significant relationship on halal awareness among Malaysia/Thailand consumers.

H2: Halal product availability have a significant relationship on halal awareness among Malaysia/Thailand consumers.

Based on literature, it is also acknowledged that halal awareness plays an imperative role towards consumers' willingness and preference to consume halal food product. For instance, the recent study of researchers [54] attempt to examine the effect of intrinsic religiosity and knowledge of halal product on awareness and purchase intention of halal product in Indonesia. All the hypothesized relationship found significant. Similarly, the studies of reference [8], [11], [31], [56] and [57] also recorded the significant influence of halal awareness on halal purchase intention. Literature also recorded on insignificant findings of relationship between halal awareness and halal purchase intention. This is observed from the findings of past studies such as reference [24], [25] and [58]. Hence, based on inconsistent findings, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Halal awareness have a significant relationship on intention to purchase halal packaged food products among Malaysia/Thailand consumers.

The following Figure 1 summarized the proposed conceptual framework of the study.

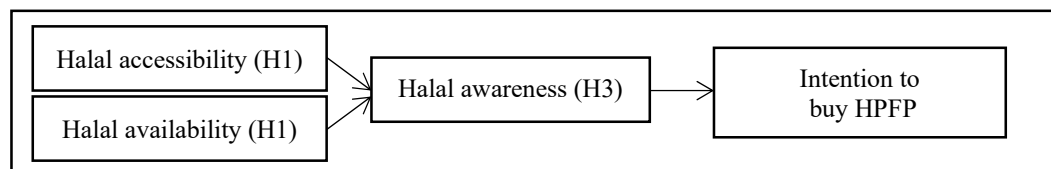


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This study is based on quantitative approach. The target population is individual Muslim and non-Muslim consumers of halal packaged food products from northern region of Malaysia (Kedah, Perlis, Penang and Perak) and southern region in Thailand (Yala, Pattani and Narathiwat). As the population is unknown, the researchers decided to use the rules of thumb suggested by reference [59]. The scholars suggested that the adequate sample size should be within 100 to 500 depending on the complexity of the model and number of construct involved. Reference [60] suggests that researcher should target for 60% of response rate. As a result, 800 questionnaires were distributed in Malaysia and Thailand with 300 and 500 sample respectively. The survey instrument namely questionnaires were conveniently distributed using mall-intercept approach.

For the purpose of the study, 7-point Likert scale was used i.e. 1-strongly disagree and 7-strongly agree. Most of the measurements were adapted from past studies. Measure for intention to purchase was adapted from [30] with 6 items. Halal merchandise availability was adapted by

combining the scale from reference [41] and [42] with 4 items. Halal accessibility measure was adapted from [40] with 4 items and halal awareness adapted from [38] with 4 items. For the purpose of data analysis, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25 was used. Descriptive analysis was used to analysis respondent's profile and understanding general behavior of halal purchase. Inferential analysis such as regression was employed to test the relationship under study based on Malaysia and Thailand data.

4. Findings and Discussions

4.1 Respondent's profile

The following Table 2 summarized the respondent's background of this study. In general, 291 respondents from Malaysia and 457 respondents from Thailand involved in this study. Majority of the respondents were female, aged between 21 to 30 years old and were Muslim. Majority of the respondents from Malaysia earned between RM1001 to RM2000 (30.2%) while for Thailand less than THB10,000 (52.3%).

Table 2. Respondent's profiles

No.	Characteristics	N (overall)	Percentage (%)	Malaysia		Thailand	
				N	%	N	%
1.	Gender						
	Male	294	38.7	136	46.7	156	34.1
	Female	466	61.3	155	53.3	301	65.9
2.	Age						
	Less than 20 years	88	11.6	31	10.7	54	11.8
	21 to 30 years	374	49.2	110	37.8	260	56.9
	31 to 40 years	140	18.4	74	25.4	63	13.8
	41 to 50 years	106	13.9	64	22.0	40	8.8
	51 to 60	34	4.5	9	3.1	25	5.5
	More than 60 years	18	4.3	3	1.0	15	3.3
3.	Ethnicity						
	Malay	265	34.9	263	90.4	-	-
	Chinese	22	2.9	19	6.5	-	-
	Indian	12	1.6	8	2.7	-	-
	Thai	461	60.7	1	0.3	457	100
4.	Religion						
	Islam	526	69.2	264	90.7	259	56.7
	Buddha	219	28.8	16	5.5	198	43.3
	Hindu	10	1.3	6	2.1	-	-
	Christian	5	0.7	5	1.7	-	-
5.	Employment						
	Public sector	81	10.7	23	7.9	57	12.5
	Private sector	269	35.4	207	71.1	57	12.5
	Self-employed	159	20.9	60	20.6	95	20.8
	Student	251	33.0	1	0.3	248	54.3
6.	Monthly income						
	Less than RM1000			54	18.6		
	RM1001 to RM2000			88	30.2		
	RM2001 to RM3000			47	16.2		
	RM3001 to RM4000			56	19.2		
	RM4001 to RM5000			13	4.5		
	More than RM5000			33	11.3		
	Less than THB10,000					239	52.3
	THB10001 to THB20000					119	26
	THB20001 to THB30000					49	10.7
	THB30001 to THB40000					37	8.1
	THB40001 to THB50000					11	2.4
	More than THB50000					2	.4

4.2 Reliability

Reliability coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha was used in this study specifically to assess the consistency of the scales used. Reference [61] suggested that the minimum acceptable coefficient value of .50. Based on the analysis,

all the main variables were reliable (halal accessibility = .853; halal availability = .942, halal awareness = .942 and halal purchase intention = .979). Following [61]'s rule of thumb, the internal consistency of items in this study were 'excellent'. The following Table 3 summarized the result of reliability test using factor analysis.

Table 3. Factor analysis and reliability

Items	Loading	Reliability
Halal accessibility		
I would give priority to halal packaged food products.	.629	.858
I have a lot of choice for halal packaged food products in my country.	.881	
I found that halal packaged food products are easily available in the market of my country.	.889	
I am willing to put considerable effort in obtaining halal package food products.	.929	
Halal merchandise availability		
The halal packaged food product range meet my expectations.	.916	.942
There are enough halal packaged food products to choose from.	.944	
There are enough halal packaged food products within each product line (e.g. the products are available in a sufficient number of sizes and colors)	.934	
New halal packaged food products are frequently presented.	.890	
Halal awareness		
I am aware of “halalness” of halal packaged food products.	.944	.942
I am aware on halal due to religious obligation.	.950	
I am concern on hygiene and food safety.	.928	
I am aware of halal packaged food products from non-Muslim manufacturers.	.898	
Intention to purchase halal packaged food products		
Choosing halal packaged food products is a good idea.	.937	.979
My friends also think that I should choose halal packaged food products.	.952	
Most people who are important to me choose halal packaged food products.	.941	
My family members prefer halal packaged food products.	.961	
I like to choose halal packaged food products.	.959	
I will recommend friends to purchase halal packaged food products.	.959	

4.3 Regression analysis

In order to answer hypothesized relationships, regression analyses were conducted. All the regression analysis assumptions as suggested by [59] were met with no serious

violation were detected. For the purpose of analysis, the data were split into country namely Malaysia and Thailand to compare halal purchase behavior in both countries. The following Table 4 and Table 5 summarized the result for Malaysia and Thailand sample respectively.

Table 4. Regression analysis (Malaysia)

	Independent variables	β -value	t-stat	Sig.	R ²	Result
Model 1					.779	
Dependent variable: halal awareness	H1: Accessibility	.835	20.642	.000		Supported
	H2: Availability	.064	1.584	.114		Not supported
Model 2					.832	
Dependent variable : intention to purchase halal packaged food product	H3: Halal awareness	.912	37.847	.000		Supported

Table 5. Regression analysis (Thailand)

	Independent variables	β -value	t-stat	Sig.	R ²	Result
Model 1						.656
Dependent variable: halal awareness	H1: Accessibility	-.006	-.203	.839		Not supported
	H2: Availability	.812	28.483	.000		Supported
Model 2						.677
Dependent variable : intention to purchase halal packaged food product	H3: Halal awareness	.823	30.888	.000		Supported

Based on Table 4, for Malaysia sample, only accessibility has a significant positive relationship on halal awareness (H1). The relationship between availability and halal awareness statistically insignificant (H2). Overall, about 77.9% variance in halal awareness is explained by halal accessibility and availability. H3 also found statistically significant with variance explained is 83.2%.

For Thailand sample, Table 5 shows that for model 1, only H2 was supported with R² value of .656 while in model 2, H3 was supported with R² value of .677. In short, based on the findings, it shows that accessibility and availability have a different effect towards halal awareness for both Malaysia and Thailand consumers.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study are in line with previous studies such as reference [8], [31], [45], [47], [51] and [52]. More importantly, it is evidence that accessibility and availability could enhanced awareness towards halal packaged food products thus supporting ATAR model.

Specifically, awareness towards halal packaged food products for both Malaysia and Thailand is determined by different factors. For Malaysia, the higher accessibility of halal product, the higher perceived halal awareness meanwhile for Thailand, the higher availability of halal product, the higher perceived halal awareness among consumers. Based on the findings, accessibility is crucial for Muslim dominant country such as Malaysia because as a Muslim consumer, they must prioritize on halal products even though demand extra effort to gain it. Halal is predominantly for Muslim consumption that related to religious practices that in line with Quran and Sunnah. In contrary, availability is found to be significant for non-Muslim country such as Thailand in stimulating halal awareness. If the manufacturers could offer wide variety and depth option of halal packaged food product in Thailand, then it is sufficient enough to stimulate consumers' awareness towards halal product. Besides, halal packaged food product range must met their expectation. Consumers in Thailand expected that newer halal product would introduce to their country to enhance their halal awareness. It is also important to note that halal awareness influenced intention to purchase halal packaged

food product for both countries. However, the effect of halal awareness on intention to purchase halal packaged food products slightly higher in Malaysia as compared to Thailand consumers.

6. Conclusion & Recommendation

This study contributes to both theory and managerial implication. Theoretically, this study bridges the gaps on inconsistent findings of the relationship between halal accessibility and availability on awareness and subsequently halal purchase intention of packaged food products. More importantly, this study found supported to ATAR model on the crucial roles of accessibility and availability to enhance consumers' awareness. However, the factor found to be country-specific whereby Muslim dominant country demand more accessibility while non-Muslim dominant look for availability. In general, as a marketers, both accessibility and availability of halal packaged food products is crucial to stimulate awareness and trial specifically intention to purchase. Marketers need to ensure halal product is easy accessible and offer a wide variety of option to fulfill customers' need especially Muslim. As this study involved both Muslim and non-Muslim consumers, it is shows that non-Muslim also are aware on halal products. However, to stimulate trial, marketers need to offer wide variety of products and present new product frequently in marketplace.

Despite the interesting findings, this study limit in term of data collection method. Due to unknown population, convenience sampling seems to be the best option researchers have at hand. Future research should consider more systematic sampling procedure to improve generalizability of the findings. Besides, the finding shows the interaction of religion towards predictors of halal awareness and halal purchase intention. Future study should consider the effect of different religion or culture in understanding overall consumer's behavior towards halal packaged food products.

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